I Am That

The science of hamsa from Vijnana Bhairava (24)

Swami Muktananda

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MOTILAL BANARSIDASS
JAWAHAR NAGAR

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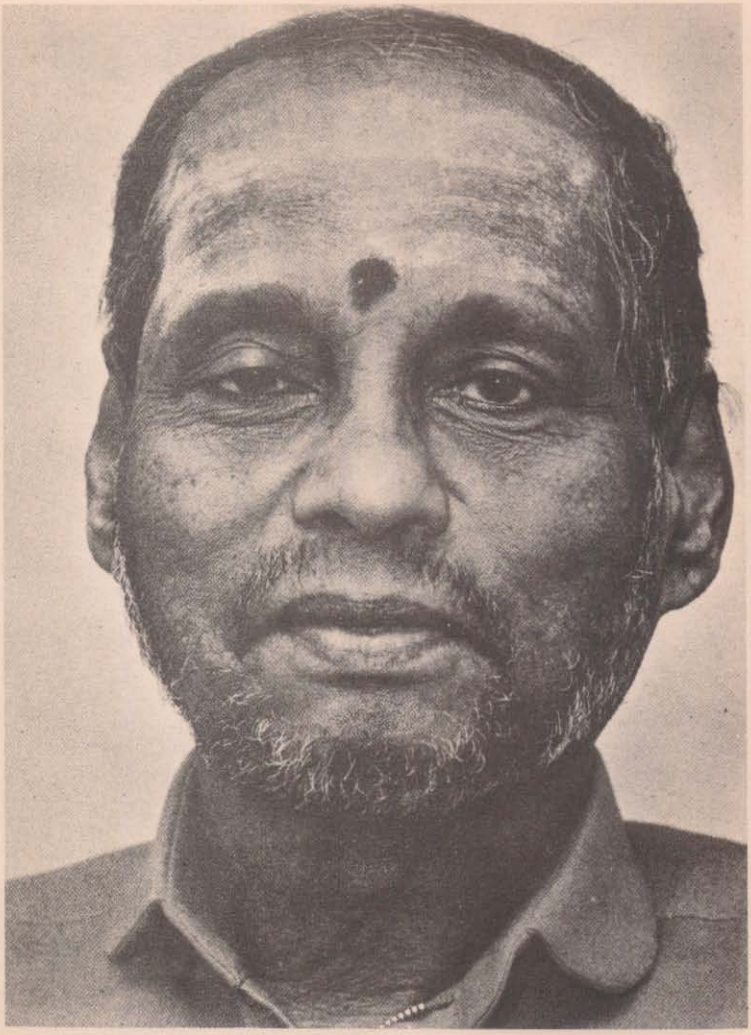

Swami Muktananda

Preface

Recently Baba Muktananda has been revealing the contents of his treasure chest of knowledge. The mysteries he is showing us are not new discoveries, but eternal truths, known for may centuries. Here Baba offers us the most valuable jewel of all — *hamsa* — which holds the secret of life, the mystery of breath. Baba explains its value according to an ancient document, the *Vijnana Bhairava.*

The *Vijnana Bhairava* is one of the oldest texts of Kashmir Shaivism. It has always been considered an authoritative work, and its verses have been profusely quoted by subsequent exponents of Kashmir Shaivism. In fact, it is held in such high esteem that it is referred to by some as *Shree Vijnana Bhairava Bhattaraka,* which means *Honourable Lord Vijnana Bhairava.* It is like a shimmering blue pearl among *agama* scriptures, ancient texts that impart the highest spiritual knowledge through dialogues between Shiva and his consort Parvati. It is called a Tantra, a scientific treatise containing the most sublime teachings on various techniques for attaining the full experience of the consciousness of Shiva, which is of the form of inner bliss and is called the state of Bhairava.

Every Indian scripture offers its own method of achieving this goal. All these methods are considered valid, because they aim at bringing one to the ultimate source of all existence by stilling the mind. The *Vijnana Bhairava* is a beautiful garland of 112

such techniques for stilling the mind. It is in the stillness of the mind that the Ultimate shines, just as the pebbles at the bottom of a lake are revealed when the surface is crystal clear and still, without a ripple.

The techniques described in the *Vijnana Bhairava* are called *dharanas,* which modern psychiatrists would be tempted to refer to as mental therapies. At the end, after all these techniques have been described, the natural and easy technique of *hamsa* is advocated. The technique is also referred to in the middle of the text as well as in the first *dharana,* in verse 24. This book is Baba's commentary on that verse.

Baba has very clearly brought out the essence of the science of *hamsa.* It is a simple technique of quietly watching the breath come in and go out, without doing anything else. The scriptures say it is *hamsa* because the incoming breath makes the sound *ham,* and the outgoing breath the sound *sa.* This process goes on continuously day and night in a living being and sounds like the repetition *ham-sa ham-sa ham-sa.* Therefore, *hamsa* is referred to as mantra, and the continuous process as *japa,* or mantra repetition. *Hamsa* is also called *ajapa-japa,* unrepeated repetition, because it is neither repeated by the tongue or the lips, nor counted on beads. It happens by itself, and one has only to become aware of it. Through the practice of watching it, one begins

to hear it and knows that it happens naturally.

Baba points out that to understand the greatness of *hamsa,* one must know the secret of prana, the life force, which pulsates throughout the entire world. Its vibration, called *spanda* in Kashmir Shaivism, creates and sustains the whole universe. It also gives life to the physical body and makes it function. Everything vibrates very subtly. Every vibration has a sound, and every sound has a vibration. Prana is the subtle vibration of supreme Consciousness. Its sound is heard in the process of breathing in and breathing out as *ham* and *sa.* Therefore, *hamsa* is also called the prana mantra, the mantra of prana. In the *Vijnana Bhairava* it is described as the utterance of the supreme Goddess, Consciousness. The movement of *ham* and *sa* is also referred to as the dance of Shiva and Shakti, which manifests the world. Saints allude to *hamsa* as *jiva,* the individual soul. Some say that it is the name of the breath. It is interesting to note that the Bible speaks of how God created Adam and breathed the breath of life into him.

The method of watching this process is to join the mind with the breath. Then, feeling one with *hamsa,* come in with the incoming breath, *ham,* and go out with the outgoing breath, *sa.* Between these two breaths there is a moment of complete stillness, like the instant when a pendulum that has completed an arc becomes motionless before

swinging back again. It is the place where *ham* or *sa* merges in the inner or outer space. At this point the breath is suspended for a while before *sa* or *ham* again arises from that place. With practice, the time during which this state of stillness is sustained begins to increase, and one experiences the bliss of the Self. This space is called *madhyadasha,* the in-between space, which is the abode of the Self, God, Truth or Consciousness. It is the place of repose. The same space exists between two thoughts. When one thought ends, before another arises, there is a fraction of a moment in which nothing happens. The mind stands still. If one can hold onto this moment, all the mysteries of the world will be revealed, for it is the source of all creation. This is why Baba attaches so much importance to this state of stillness. This, indeed, is the secret of *hamsa,* the breath, which has been known throughout all time by the great saints.

Recently I happened to read the *Essene Gospel of Peace,* Book Two. I was amazed to find in it the following words ascribed to Jesus: "We worship the Holy Breath which is placed higher than all the other things created. For, lo, the eternal and sovereign luminous space, where rule the unnumbered stars, is the air we breathe in and the air we breathe out. And in the moment betwixt the breathing in and the breathing out is hidden all the mysteries of the Infinite Garden."

Baba often says that mind and prana are twin brothers. Being two similar aspects of the same Chiti, the supreme Consciousness, they are closely related to each other. What happens to one happens to the other. If one is controlled, the other is automatically controlled. Therefore, one of the methods of stilling the mind is to control the prana. The uneven movement of the two breaths creates restlessness in the mind, and then a person perceives duality in the world. When, through the practice of *hamsa,* the Kundalini is awakened, the rhythm of the breath slows down and becomes even. Gradually, breathing becomes very subtle, and the breath begins to move inside the *sushumna,* the central nerve. This makes the mind balanced and quiet; it turns within toward the Self and becomes the Self. Thus *jiva,* the individual, becomes Shiva, the Universal, and experiences unity will all.

By the repetition of *hamsa,* the awareness of *aham sah,* "I am That," arises. When *hamsa* is repeated with this awareness it sounds like *ham so ham so ham so ham so ham so.* This is because according to Sanskrit grammatical rules when *aham* and *sah* are used together in a sentence, the *a* of *aham* becomes silent, the *h* of *sah* becomes *o* and the preceding *a* is dropped. For this reason, *hamsa* is sometimes referred to as hamso.

As one practises *hamsa,* "I am That," the recognition of "That" comes. Gradually, the

awareness shifts from "I" to "That", and when this happens, *hamsa* (or *hamso*), "I am That," reverses and becomes *so'ham,* "That am I." In one the emphasis is on *ham,* "I," in the other on *so,* "That." One starts with individual self-awareness, the other with Universal Self-Awareness, but the meaning of both is the same. Both indicate the identity of the individual self with the supreme Self. Further, the realization comes that it is the unlimited I-consciousness of the Universal Self which has contracted into the limited I-consciousness of the embodied self. Ultimately, even the ideas of "I" and "That" disappear, and what is left is only the experience of being One. In other words, the *ha* and *s* of *so'ham* drop away and what remains is *Om,* the unified substratum and source of all. Thus *hamsa, so'ham* and even *Om* are one and the same. The distinction between hamsa and so'ham is like the distinction between saying "The son belongs to the father," and "The father belongs to the son." Both points of view are essentially the same.

Hamsa is the mantra of breath which one practises while sitting quietly. Baba says that *hamsa* is the mantra of the Self, one's own original mantra. It is always going on within, whether a person knows it or not. Therefore, anyone can practise it, but it has to be learnt and its mystery unfolded by the Guru.*

The science of *hamsa* is the path and practice of

great Siddhas. Saints such as Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Mira and Jnaneshwar have sung its glory. So does Baba in this book. *Hamsa* is a sublime means through which one attains immortality. Its prescription is outlined in this small book, and it is easily obtained by the Guru's grace. Baba has revealed its secret. To the reader it is like a *gurumantra.* It is a gift from the Guru. Let us watch it with great reverence and with Baba's blessings merge into the space between *ham* and *sa,* and know the truth: I am That.

Swami Prajnananda

* At other times, if one prefers one may repeat any other mantra given by the Guru. Other mantras can be coordinated with the breath, but it is not necessary to do so. If one wishes to coordinate it with the breath, one must repeat the entire mantra with each incoming breath and each outgoing breath.

urdhve praano hyadho jivo
visargaatmaa parochcharet
utpattidvitayasthaane
bharanaad bharitaa sthitih:

"The *prana* goes up (out)
and the *jiva (apana)* goes down.
These are the utterance of the supreme Goddess,
whose nature is to create.
By expanding either of the two spaces
(between the breaths)
one experiences the state of fullness of Bhairava."

Vijnana Bhairava (24)

The Self

Man goes to great trouble
to acquire knowledge of the material world.
He learns all branches of mundane science.
He explores the earth,
and even travels to the moon.
Yet he neveer tries to find out
what exists within himself.
Because he is unaware
of the enormous power
which lies hidden within him,
he looks for support in the outer world.
Because he doesn't know the boundless happiness
which lies inside his heart,
he looks for satisfaction in mundane activities
and pleasures.
Because he doesn't experience the inner love,
he looks for love from others.
The truth is that the inner Self
of every human being
is supremely great,
and supremely lovable.
Everything is contained in the Self.
The creative power of this entire universe
lies inside every one of us.
The divine Principle
which creates and sustains this world
pulsates within us
in the form of supremely blissful light.
It scintillates in the heart

and shines through all our senses.
If, instead of pursuing knowledge
of the outer world,
we were to pursue inner knowledge,
we would discover that effulgence
very soon.

Without the knowledge of the Self,
knowledge of outer things is like
a string of zeroes:
Zeroes are valueless
until you place a numeral in front of them.
In the same way, knowledge of the outer world
may bring you great material benefit,
but it cannot in itself bring satisfaction.
Real happiness,
real fulfillment,
comes only when you discover the Self.

To know the Self
is the true aim and purpose of human life.
Because he does not understand the glory
of his own Self,
man gets into the habit
of seeing himself as small, as imperfect,
and as separate from God.
In this way,
he denies himself the experience
of his divinity.

We pursue different spiritual practices
only for the sake

of experiencing this inner divinity.
Yet we cannot attain the Self
through spiritual practices
because the Self is already attained.
The Self is always with us.
Just as the sun cannot be separated from its light,
the Self cannot be separated from us.
The power of the Self sustains our life.
If the Self were not present within us,
our eyes would not see,
nor would our ears hear,
nor would our breath come in and go out.
It is due to the Self that the heart beats,
that the mind thinks,
discriminates and fantasizes.
It is due to the Self
that love arises within us.
The Self gives motive power to all our senses
and illuminates the objects we preceive
through these senses.
This body does not function on its own.
Without the presence of the Self,
it is nothing but a corpse.
Not only does the Self
pervade and sustain our own individual existence,
it also pulsates
in every atom of this world.
In this way, the Self is apparent;
it is manifest.

Some philosophers say
that the Self cannot be known.
Yet the Self is always being experienced,
at every moment of our life.

A sage wrote,
svatantra svachchaatma sphurati
satatam chetasi shivah:
"The Self, Shiva,
is supremely pure and independent,
and you can experience it constantly
throbbing and pulsating within your mind."
It cannot be perceived by the senses
because it makes the senses function.
It cannot be perceived by the mind
because it makes the mind think.
Still, the Self can be known,
and to know it
one does not need the help of the mind
or the senses.

According to Shaivism,
the supreme Principle has two aspects,
prakasha and *vimarsha.*
With *prakasha* that Principle
illuminates everything in the world,
including itself.
With *vimarsha,*
that Principle gives knowledge
about the things it illuminates
and also differentiates between them.

Prakasha makes us know that an object exists,
and *vimarsha* gives us the understanding
of the nature of that object.
When you look at a book,
it is *prakasha* which makes you aware that
something is there
and *vimarsha* which makes you identify it as
a book and not a tape recorder.
Prakasha and *vimarsha*
exist in everything in the world.
The Self is of the form of *prakasha* and *vimarsha.*
It illuminates itself,
and it makes itself aware of what it is.
The sun which lights the world
also lights itself.
In the same way,
the Self
which gives light to the inner and outer senses
also illuminates itself.
For this reason,
people who have knowledge of the Truth
say that the Self can be known
with its own light.
A poet has written,
"How can the shining sun remain hidden?
How can the pulsating Self,
which gives radiance to all senses
and to all sense objects,
remain obscured?"

In the *Bhagavad Gita,*
Lord Krishna says this very clearly:
buddhigraahyam atindriyam:
"Although it is beyond the senses,
it can be known by the subtle intellect."
Just as we see our own reflection in a mirror,
the Self can be seen
reflected in the mirror
of the purified intellect.

Mantra

The scriptures and the saints
have described many methods
through which one can know the Self.
Among these, the repetition of the name of God,
mantra *japa,*
has been called the highest path,
and the easiest for the present age.
The mystery of mantra is very great.
To know the mantra is to know God.
The mind achieves one-pointed awareness of God
only through mantra.
Truly speaking,
mantra is not merely letters or syllables.
Mantra is the basis of the mind.
The universal creative energy,
which is one with God,
vibrates at the root of the mind,
just as it vibrates in everything in the universe.
According to Shaivism,
that inner pulsation is the true mantra.
It is through that
that we contemplate, perceive and experience
the supreme Principle.
When the mind immerses itself in that vibration,
it is the same as the mantra.
The *Shivasutras* say
that the mind *is* mantra: *chittam mantrah.*
The power of mantra repetition
lies in its capacity to bring you

to the state of oneness
with that inner pulsation of consciousness.
In fact, *mantra maheshvaraha:*
"Mantra is the Supreme Lord."
Mantra is itself the form of God:
His name and nature are not different.
This is why
you should always repeat the mantra
with the understanding that
the mantra,
the goal of the mantra,
and the repeater of the mantra
are one.
If you think that you,
the mantra,
and the goal of the mantra
are different from each other,
you will never realise the mantra's full power.
The alphabet itself
has immense importance;
it is God's creative power,
His Shakti, which has taken the form
of the letters of the alphabet.
God and His creative power are one,
and the *Shivasutras* say
that all the letters of the alphabet
are embodiments of God.
The tantric scriptures say:
mantraa varnaatmakaahaa sarve

sarve varnaahaa shivaatmakaahaa:
"All mantras are composed of letters,
and all letters are of the form of Shiva."
In *Sri Tantra Sadbhava,* Shiva says,
sarve varnaatmakaa mantraas
te cha shaktyaatmakaaha priye
shaktistu maatrukaa jneyaa
saa cha jneyaa shivaatmikaa
"Mantras consist of letters,
which are of the form of Shakti.
Shakti manifests herself as the alphabet.
She is of the form of Shiva."

Each letter of the alphabet
has it own particular power,
or presiding deity,
and when the letters are combined in a mantra,
their power is multiplied.
So, mantra has tremendous force.
One should repeat it with complete alertness
and understanding.
As you repeat the mantra,
its vibrations mingle with the prana,
the vital force.
They travel to the heart,
and from there, they pass on
to permeate all the seven constituents of the body,
purifying the body and the mind.
As the body and mind become pure,
you attain the state

in which the mantra repeater
and the inner Self
vibrate together as pure awareness.
As long as you repeat the mantra
on the gross level,
you experience it as sounds and syllables.
But through the Guru's grace,
you pass beyond this state,
and the inner divine nature of the letters
is revealed.

Afte you have repeated the mantra
for a long time with a quiet mind,
it begins to vibrate inwardly.
As you repeat the mantra
in rhythm with the breath,
you get into a state of intoxication.
When you begin to feelthis intoxication,
you can be sure that your practice
has begun to bear fruit.
In the final stages of this practice,
you do not repeat the mantra deliberately,
you hear it going on within yourself.

Hamsa

The technique I am about to describe
is the teaching of the Siddhas,
the highest of all spiritual practices.
It gives the direct experience of the Self.
Its knowledge has been passed down
from Guru to disciple
in unbroken lineage.
If one receives this mantra from a Siddha Guru,
and practises it
according to the Guru's instructions,
one also attains the state of perfection,
the state of a Siddha.

The speciality of *hamsa*
is that it works for anyone.
It can be practised very easily and naturally
by young people or old people,
by people of every country
and every religion.
One can practise it
while living an ordinary life in the world.
Through the science of *hamsa* mantra,
one attains
that by which everything is attained,
one perceives
that by which everything is perceived,
one knows
that by which everything is known.

Hamsa is the natural mantra.
There are many mantras

which you can repeat with your tongue,
many mantras
which you repeat on the beads of a *japa* mala.
But *hamsa* is not like these.
Hamsa mantra repeats itself
spontaneously
along with your breathing.
For this reason,
it is called your own mantra,
or the mantra of the Self.

The science of *hamsa* is revealed
in the *Vijnana Bhairava,*
one of the supreme scriptures of Shaivism.
The *Vijnana Bhairava* is in the form
of a dialogue between a Guru and a disciple.
The Guru is Bhairava, Lord Shiva,
the supreme Principle of the universe.
The disciple is his consort, Bhairavi,
the Universal Mother, who is called Shakti,
Shiva's creative energy.

Bhairavi, after hearing Bhairava describe
the state of the supreme Reality,
asks him to reveal to her a simple means
of knowing that supreme
and secret inner Principle.
In response, Lord Shiva explains to her
the awareness of *hamsa.*

* * *

Sit quietly and watch
the going out and coming in
of the breath.
The outgoing breath is called *prana,*
and the incoming breath is called *apana.*
Apana is also called *jiva,* the individual soul,
because only when the *apana* enters the body
can it be said
that the soul is in the body.
If the *prana* goes out
and the *apana* doesn't come back in,
then the body is nothing but a corpse.
Bhairava says that
as the breath comes in,
it makes the sound *ham,*
and as the breath goes out,
it makes the sound *sa.*
The sound of the breath
coming in
and going out
is the repetition of *hamsa* mantra.
This mantra goes on continually
in all living creatures.
It is due to its pulsation that we are alive.
In a human being,
the breath comes in and goes out
21,600 times a day,
and each time it repeats this mantra.
We may think we are repeating the mantra

at certain times,
but in reality it goes on spontaneously,
21,600 times a day.
This is how enlightened beings understand
mantra repetition.
The great saint Kabir described this
in one of his poems, saying,
"I am not repeating the mantra on my beads,
nor am I repeating it with my tongue.
God himself is repeating my mantra,
while I sit quietly and listen to it."
This is known as *ajapa-japa,*
the unrepeated mantra repetition.
One who simply watches the breath,
being aware
that it is coming in and going out
with the sounds *ham* and *sa,*
is doing *ajapa-japa,*
and this is the true way
of practising the mantra.
The repetition of *hamsa* mantra
is also called *hamsa gayatri.*
It is the self-born matra.
The Lord Himself
initiates us into this mantra
when we are in our mother's womb.
It is said in the *Garbha Upanishad*
that when the fetus in the womb
is seven months old,

the soul receives knowledge
of its past and future.
It knows who it has been
and who it will be.
When the movie of its lives
passes before its mind,
it becomes frightened
and begins moving restlessly
here and there.
But in whichever direction
the fetus tries to move,
it runs into trouble.
As it moves upward,
it comes up against the stomach.
There, it is burnt by the gastric fire.
It moves away
and bumps into the kidney.
The kidney is very salty,
and when the fetus receives the shock of that,
it moves away again.
But when it moves away from the kidney,
it comes up against the intestines,
which stink.
In this way, it keeps moving all the time,
and wherever it moves,
a new difficulty arises to welcome it.
Finally, the fetus becomes desperate
and begins to call out to God for help.
Now, God has been watching all this,

and when at last the soul starts crying out
and taking refuge in Him,
God bestows His grace upon it.
He gives it instruction in *so'ham,*
which means "That am I"
and which is the same as *hamsa* mantra.
As the fetus repeats the mantra,
it begins to understand
its indentity with the supreme Principle.
It becomes immersed
in the *so'ham* awareness,
the awareness of its true nature,
and becomes calm and serene.
However, when nine months are over,
the fetus is forcibly ejected
from the mother's womb.
The moment it comes out, it starts crying,
making the sound "kwanh kwanh," or
ko ham, ko ham.
It forgets God's instruction
and the understanding it has attained.
It forgets the awareness of *so'ham*
and cries *ko ham,*
which means "Who am I?"
From that moment,
it begins to identify itself in different ways,
saying, "I am this body,"
"I belong to a particular class,"
"I am a woman,"

"I am a man,"
"I am a sinner."
It becomes established
in this kind of understanding,
and lives its life accordingly.
Yet, all the time, *hamsa* is going on.
When the child comes out of the womb,
it first breathes out
and then breathes in with the sound *ham.*
From then on,
the mantra keeps repeating itself.
Because one doesn't remember
that one has been initiated into the mantra,
one goes to a Guru.
However, the mantra is already going on inside;
all one has to do
is become aware of it.
To understand the secret of *hamsa,*
one first has to understand the secret of prana.
One should never underestimate
the value of prana,
the vital force.*
All beings are alive
because of prana.
In fact, prana pervades and supports
the entire world;
even trees and mountains exist with its support.

* The word "prana" has two different meanings. It refers both to the vital force of the universe, and to the exhalation.

Although prana is one, within the human body
it takes five forms,
known as
prana, apana, samana, vyana and *udana.*
In these five forms
it flows through the system of 72,000 *nadis,*
or bodily channels,
and carries on all the processes of our life.
Everything depends on prana:
sarvam praane pratishthitam.
Prana is life itself.
When the prana stops moving
in and out of the body,
there is either *samadhi* or death.
It is the power of the Self,
the universal Consciousness,
which comes in and goes out as the breath.
A scriptural author says,
praaksamvit praane parinataa:
"The universal Consciousness becomes prana."
So the sound which the breath makes
as it flows in and out
is the utterance of that supreme Consciousness,
the universal energy,
who creates this universe out of her own being
and who, when she resides in the human body,
is known as Kandalini.
Kundalini herself is repeating the mantra *hamsa.*
Hamsa is the actual sound of God.

The utterance of Kundalini,
which goes on continually
and which we know as inhalation and exhalation,
vibrates.
According to Shaivism
it is this vibration
which creates the inner and outer worlds.
It is said,
aadau bhagavaan shabdha raashihi:
"God originally manifested as sound,"
from which emanated the letters of the alphabet.
Ham and *sa* are the source of all these letters;
they are the original sound vibration
which manifests the universe.
The entire world
is of the form of the words
which have emanated from these two syllables.
Words are the source
of all our different feelings.
Through words,
we experience the dualities of pleasure and pain,
good and evil,
virtue and sin.
If someone calls you a sinner,
you feel insulted and ashamed.
But, if someone calls you a good person,
you become happy.
This is the duality created by words,
and because of this duality,

we suffer
or experience happiness.
Yet all these feelings and states
are nothing more
than the play of the two syllables *ham* and *sa,*
because all words have emanated from them.
To understand these two syllables
as they are
is liberation.
Ham,
the sound which comes in with the inhalation,
is Shiva, the pure I-consciousness, the inner Self.
Sa,
which goes out with the outbreath,
is Shakti, God's creative energy.
Inhalation and exhalation
are the dance of Shiva and Shakti,
of God and his creative energy.
If you perceive this with true understanding,
you realise the Truth
immediately.
By understanding the mystery of *hamsa,*
one comes to know the Self.
The mantra *hamsa*
is the source of all knowledge.
Therefore, to obtain knowledge,
you should repeat it.
The poet Kalidas,
who knew the mystery of words, said that

whether it is in mundane or spiritual life,
you cannot understand anything
without using words.
You can describe an object
only when it has a name,
only when letters are combined into words
and have a meaning.
The word conveys the knowledge of an object.
In the same way,
Knowledge of God
is contained in these two syllables.
Until you become aware
that the mantra is going on within you,
you should repeat it.
As you repeat it, sitting quietly
and combining the two syllables with the breath,
you eventually begin to understand
that it is happening
on its own.
You begin to hear it
coming in
and going out
with the breath.
You should understand this very clearly,
because it is a mystery
which only a sharp
and subtle intelligence can grasp.
As you watch the breath
coming in and going out,

you will become aware that when it comes in,
it comes in to a distance of twelve fingers
and merges.
The place where it merges
is called *hridaya,* the heart.
The breath merges here,
and then it arises again
and goes out to a distance of twelve fingers
and merges in the space outside.
That outer space,
is called *dvadashanta,* the external heart.
Here, the heart does not mean the physical organ.
The heart is the place where the breath merges,
inside and outside.
In reality, these two places are one.
The duality of inner and outer space
exists only because
we have the sense of our physical body.
The moment we transcend
our body-consciousness,
the inner and outer spaces merge.
This happens naturally
through the repetition of *hamsa.*
When the breath comes in
with the sound *ham*
and merges inside,
there is a fraction of a moment
which is completely still
and free from thought.

This is the *madhyadasha,*
the space between the breaths.
This is where you have to focus in meditation.
The space where *ham* merges inside,
before *sa* has arisen,
is the abode of God,
of Consciousness
of the Self.
The place where *sa* merges
outside
is equally the place of God.
One who comes to know
that moment
of the merging of the two syllables
experiences the Truth.
As you watch the breath,
with *ham* and *sa,*
contemplate that space
and allow it to extend itself.
That still space between the breaths,
that space where no thoughts exist,
is the true goal of the mantra.
The yoga scriptures mention
many different forms of *pranayama*
and *kumbhaka,* suspension of breath,
which yogis practise in order to get into *samadhi.*
But Shaivism says that
pranayama and *kumbhaka*
should happen naturally,

through the inspiration of God.
The state of stillness
which occurs when the syllables merge
inside and outside
is natural *kumbhaka.*
You don't have to make a deliberate effort
to hold your breath,
because as you practise *hamsa,*
the time of the suspension of breath
begins to expand.
The duration of the *kumbhaka*
increases naturally.
As long as the breath is suspended,
you experience the Self.
This is the state of *samadhi.*
From there arises perfect bliss.
The purpose of repeating *hamsa* mantra
is to attain this state.
Sometimes people express confusion
about whether to repeat *hamsa* or *so'ham,*
but there is no reason for confusion,
because *hamsa* is *so'ham* and *so'ham* is *hamsa.*
Both mantras are one.
One can use
whichever form of the mantra
one likes,
whichever one the Guru gives.
Through practising the mantra,
you come to know the space

where the two syllables arise and subside.
That is the state of God,
and we take the help of the two syllables
just to attain it.
Until you get into the state
where the mantra syllables merge,
keep repeating the mantra.
But understand that the true goal of the mantra
is that awareness.

Once King Janaka
was sitting on the bank of a river,
repeating *so'ham* at the top of his voice.
A sage named Ashtavakra
happened to be passing by.
He was a great knower of Truth,
an enlightened being.
When he saw Janaka, he was surprised.
He knew that Janaka
was a being with great understanding,
so he wondered why he was repeating
so'ham, so'ham in this manner.

Great beings
do not teach only through philosophical discourses.
They use many subtle means to make their point.
Ashtavakra watched Janaka for a while,
wondering how he should instruct him.
Then he had an idea.
He sat down.
In one hand he had a water bowl,

and in the other hand
he had the T-shaped stick
which yogis use for support in meditation.
He began to say, very loudly,
"This is my water bowl; this is my yoga stick!
This is my water bowl; this is my yoga stick!"
King Janaka
began repeating his mantra louder.
This sage also began to repeat his mantra louder.
After a while
King Janaka became annoyed.
He opened his eyes and asked,
"O brother, what are you doing?"
"What are *you* doing?" asked Ashtavakra.
"I am repeating the mantra *so'ham,*" Janaka said.
Ashtavakra said, 'I am also repeating a mantra.
I am repeating,
'This is my water bowl; this is my yoga stick'."
The king said, "Have you lost your brains?
Who told you
that the water bowl and the stick
don't belong to you?
Why do you have to keep shouting about it?"
The sage replied, "It seems to me
that you are the one who lacks understanding.
Who told you
that you are not That?
Why do you have to go on repeating
that you are That?"

When Janaka heard this
he suddenly realised
that he was That
and that he did not need
to go on repeating *so, ham.*

This is what we also need to understand.
Hamsa is not a mantra that you merely repeat.
What you have to do
is become established
in the awareness of the mantra
going on inside you,
in the goal of the mantra,
in the pulsation
which exists in the space
where the syllables arise and subside.
When I say, "Meditate on your own Self,"
this is what I mean.
To meditate on your Self means
to attain this space.
This is a very natural *sadhana.*
It is the highest knowledge.
There is no greater knowledge
than the knowledge of *hamsa,*
no greater *japa* than *ajapa-japa.*
This mantra is the same for everybody.
No matter which country you come from,
no matter which religion you follow,
your breath comes in with the sound *ham*
and goes out with the sound *sa.*

This mantra comes from
the deepest level of speech;
it emanates spontaneously with the breath.
A true yogi
is one who does this natural *pranayama,*
uniting his incoming and outgoing breaths
with the syllables *ham* and *sa*
and performing this natural *japa, ajapa-japa.*
In this way,
a yogi brings himself and God together;
he unites himself
with the Self
from which he has become separated.
There are people who do a few postures
and *pranayama*
and call themselves yogis,
but these are not true yogis.
A true yogi
is one who becomes established in his own Self
with the awareness of *hamsa,*
of "I am That."
Once one is established in this state,
meditation goes on continually,
whatever one is doing.
Kabir wrote,
so'ham ajapa jaap, chhute punya aur paap:
"The unrepeated mantra repetition, *so'ham,*
destroys all your sins and virtues."
The *so'ham* awareness is also described

as the awareness, *aham brahmasmi:*
"I am the Absolute,"
or *tat twam asi:*
"Thou art That."
It is the understanding
of your identity with the supreme Principle,
and this understanding
has the power
to destroy all your accumulated karmas
and past impressions.
Not only does it destroy the effects
of millions of sins,
it also cuts the bondage which arises
from your good actions.
It puts an end
to the cycle of birth and death,
killing the notion of duality.
As long as you have the feeling
of duality,
the feeling that one human being
is different from another,
that one class is different from another,
you cannot experience real happiness.
The sense of otherness
is the source of all fear,
of all suffering,
and of all sins.
However, as one practises *hamsa,*
the consciousness of equality dawns

in a natural manner.
The mind and the breathing
are intimately connected,
for it is the movement of prana which creates
the countless universes
that arise and subside
in the mind.
When the breath is uneven,
the mind becomes disturbed,
and the sense of duality arises.
As the breath becomes even,
the mind automatically becomes still.
Ordinary people often breathe rapidly,
and their outgoing breath is expelled
for a long distance.
This indicates an outgoing mind.
As the mantra goes deeper,
the breathing slows,
and the outgoing breath becomes shorter.
The incoming and outgoing breaths become even,
and as this happens,
the mind and senses turn inward,
toward the Self.
The purpose of all the *pranayama*
which Hatha yogis perform
is to balance
the duration of inhalation and exhalation,
because it is this balance
which quiets the mind

and brings the awareness of equality.
This happens very easily and naturally
through the practice of *hamsa.*

As one becomes aware of *hamsa,*
the breathing naturally begins
to come in and go out
to the same distance,
and for the same length of time.
The spontaneous suspension of breath
which I have already described
happens automatically.
In the still space
where the breath merges,
the feeling of duality disappears,
and one becomes conscious of
the equality of all things.
Jnaneshwar Maharaj said,
tain sharivabhavaava naashati
indriyen vishaya visarati
jain so'ham bhaava
pratiti prakata hoye:
"As you become aware of *so'ham,*
the body-consciousness dissolves,
and the senses,
which have been wandering among outer objects,
automatically turn within."
Then
you experience the union of Shiva and Shakti
within yourself.

Outside and inside become one.
The syllable *ham,*
which comes in with the *apana,*
is the seed mantra of the Self.
The embodied Self,
which experiences itself as I,
is really the divine Self.
This *aham,* this I, has two forms.
One is the ordinary I-consciousness,
the ego sense,
which identifies itself with the body and senses,
which considers itself to be man or woman,
American or Spanish or Indian,
black or white.
The other I is the true *aham,*
the pure I-consciousness,
and this I is God.
The ordinary I
is consciousness in bondage.
The pure I
is consciousness in the state of liberation.
As you repeat *hamsa*
with the understanding of the perfect *aham,*
this realization dawns.
When you begin to have the awareness
of this pure I,
the intellect, too, becomes purified,
and then you are able to perceive God
shining within.

The knowledge that you are the Self
arises spontaneously within you.
The moment you perceive the supreme Principle
in the mantra.
you are liberated.
Jnaneshwar Maharaj said,
paim pratibimbauni bimbavereem
prabhechee jaisee ujiree
te so'ham vritti avadhaareem, taisee hoye
aiseni maga parasparem, te so'ham
drishti jaim avatare
taim tiye hee sakata sare, aapaiseyaa:
"Just as light pervades everywhere,
the *so'ham* consciousness extends
from the embodied Self to the supreme Self.
When man becomes fully immersed
in the *so'ham* vision,
he spontaneously merges in the supreme Being."
Knowledge of God
is a matter of understanding.
You don't have to make an effort to find God,
because there is no place where God is not.
He is not something you are going
to attain;
you are simply supposed to
become aware of Him.
In the same way,
the science of *hamsa*
is a matter of awareness.

It is the highest *sadhana*
because one does not
do the practice,
one simply becomes aware
that the practice is happening
on its own.

The *Guru Gita says,*
ham bijam: "*Ham* is the seed,"
and in the seed of the Self
the entire universe is contained.
In the same way,
hamsa mantra
is the seed of all spiritual practices.
Just as a huge banyan tree springs
from a tiny seed,
and contains branches, roots, leaves,
flowers, and fruit, and thousands of other seeds,
the seed of *hamsa* contains yoga,
meditation, *japa,* austerities,
and all powers.

The great saint Namdev said,
"Just keep repeating *so'ham, so'ham*
all the time,
and you yourself will become God."
This mantra has the power to transform you
completely.

Siddha Yoga

As you keep repeating the mantra,
as through the Guru's grace you become aware
that it is going on within,
the inner Kundalini energy,
which has been dormant,
awakens automatically.

The Upanishads say,

bibharti kundali shaktir
aatmaanam hamsamaashritaa
hamsah praanaashrayo nityam
praanaahaa naadipathaashrayaahaa
hamsavidyaa mavijnaaya
muktau yatnam karoti yah
sa nabhobhakshanenaiva
kshunnivrittim karishyati:

"The Kundalini Shakti
operates through the power of *hamsa,*
which is not different from the Self.
Hamsa flows with the prana,
the vital force,
and the prana flows through the *nadis,*
the bodily channels.
One who strives for liberation
without knowing the science of *hamsa*
is like one who tries to satisfy his hunger
by eating the sky."
When, through the practice of *hamsa,*
the inhalation and exhalation become balanced,
and the breath is retained

in spontaneous *kumbhaka,*
the breath,
which has been going in and out
through the *ida* and *pingala nadis,*
moves into the *sushumna,* the central channel.
The inner Kundalini,
which has been dormant,
becomes active and begins to unfold.
Then a self-born yoga,
the yoga of the Siddhas,
takes place within you.
The awakening of Kundalini
brings about
the completion of the spiritual journey.
Until Kundalini awakens,
you practise yoga by your own efforts
and according to your own whim.
But the yoga which takes place
after Kundalini has awakened naturally
happens according to the inspiration of God,
in a spontaneous manner,
while you go about your daily life.
Kundalini is the energy
which has created the entire universe,
and when she is awakened within you,
she works with her full power.
Moving within the body,
she causes yoga postures and *pranayama*
to take place spontaneously,

as they are necessary.
She purifies the blood and the bodily fluids
and makes the body strong and free of disease.
She stills the mind
and focuses the attention within.
Meditation occurs naturally,
and knowledge arises on its own.
As Kundalini unfolds,
the inner world is revealed to you.
Every day you have new realizations
which fill you with wonder.
The world of yoga
is full of amazing things.
As Kundalini unfolds,
one sees new colours and scintillating inner lights.
One hears exquisite divine sounds,
tastes subtle nectars,
smells celestial fragrances.
One travels to different inner worlds.
Love for all creatures begins to pulse within,
and happiness bubbles up continuously.
As one pursues this self-born yoga,
the light of the Self reveals itself.
Watching this tender, infinitely fascinating light,
the Blue Pearl,
the yogi becomes aware of his true glory.
Though smaller than a sesame seed,
the tiny Blue Pearl
contains the entire universe.

It is the light of God,
the form of God within us.
One day,
this tiny light expands to fill the universe,
and then the yogi experiences
his all-pervasiveness.
He attains the state of the supreme Truth,
the state which is beyond all pain and pleasure.
He experiences the true bliss
of Consciousness.
He knows without any doubt,
"I am God, and God is me."
Such a yogi
lives in constant awareness of the Self,
in the state of perfect fearlessness
and freedom.
This is liberation.
This is what you attain through the practice
and the understanding
of *hamsa.*

This is the secret of a Siddha's *sadhana;*
this the the practice of perfect beings;
this is the wisdom of the greatest saints.
Practise it with great reverence.
There is no greater mantra than this one,
no greater worship than meditation,
no greater deity than the Self.
Always remember this.
It is the final instruction of the Guru,

the command of Shiva.
The science of *hamsa*
is the science of the Self.
It is the source of all knowledge.
It is God's gift to us.
Repeat it with respect.
Sit very quietly.
Become aware of the breath
coming in and going out
repeating *hamsa, hamsa.*
Understand that *ham* is the perfect I,
the pure Consciousness.
Understand that *sa* is the universal energy.
Focus subtly
on the place where these syllables
arise and subside,
and you will know the Self.
This is the true state of God.
You are That.

Glossary

Ashtavakra (*lit.* deformed in eight places): A great sage of ancient times and the son of a sage; author of the *Ashtavakra Gita;* a dialogue between Ashtavakra and Janaka, the theme of which is that one can attain freedom from *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death) only through realization of the nondualistic supreme Reality.

Bhagavad Gita: A sacred, very popular scripture narrating the teachings of Lord Krishna to Arjuna. It occurs in the *Mahabharata.*

Bhairava: The supreme Reality, Shiva.

Bhairavi: The supreme Energy, Shakti.

Garbha Upanishad: One of the Upanishads, which gives an elaborate description of the physical body and how the soul abides in it and longs for liberation. *See also:* Upanishads.

Guru: A spiritual Master who has attained oneness with God and who initiates his disciples and devotees into the spiritual path and guides them to *moksha,* or liberation. In the Siddha tradition, the Guru is the grace-bestowing power of God who initiates disciples through Shaktipat.

Guru Gita: A Sanskrit text in which Lord Shiva expounds the mysteries of the Guru principle to his consort Parvati.

ida: The *nadi* which originates at the base of the

spine and terminates at the left nostril; called the moon *nadi* because of its cooling effect.

Janaka: A saint who ruled the kingdom of Mithila in ancient India. His Guru was Yajnavalkya; his daughter was Sita, Lord Rama's consort.

Jnaneshwar Maharaj (1275 - 1296): A great saint of Maharashtra whose commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita,* the *Jnaneshwari,* written before he was twenty, is considered one of the great scriptures of modern times.

Kabir (1440 - 1518): A great mystic and poet who lived in Benares and was a weaver by trade.

Kalidas (ca. fifth century): A great classical poet of India; author of many plays and poems.

karma: 1. Action; 2. force or effect of one's accumulated past actions.

Krishna (*lit.* the dark one; the Lord who attracts irresistibly): The eighth incarnation of Vishnu. His life is described in the *Bhagavata Purana;* his major teaching on yoga is contained in the *Bhagavad Gita.*

kumbhaka: Voluntary or involuntary suspension of breath.

Kundalini (*lit.* the coiled one): The spiritual energy which lies coiled at the base of the spine of every individual. When awakened, it begins to rise,

purifying the body and initiating spiritual processes.

mala: A rosary used for repetition of the mantra.

mantra: Sacred words or sounds invested with the power to transform the inidvidual who repeats them.

nadi: Subtle nerve channel for the flow of prana; there are 72,000 *nadis* in the human body.

Namdev (thirteenth century): A poet-saint of Maharashtra; a tailor by trade and contemporary of Jnaneshwar.

Parvati (*lit.* daughter of the mountains): Wife of Shiva and daughter of the King of the Himalayas; a name of the Universal Mother, or Shakti.

pingala: The *nadi* which originates at the base of the spine and terminates at the right nostril; called the sun *nadi* because of its heating effect.

pranayama: Regulation and restraint of breath.

sadhana: The practice of spiritual discipline.

samadhi: State of meditative union with the Absolute.

seed mantra (*bija* mantra): A basic sound from the Sanskrit language, said to be the natural name of the object it denotes. The repetition of *bija* mantra manifests the object, deity, or state which it represents.

seven constituents of the body: Lymphatic fluid, flesh, bone, blood, marrow, semen and fat.

Shaivism (Kashmir Shaivism): Philosophy of nondualism that recognises the entire universe as a manifestation of Chiti, or divine conscious energy. Shaivism explains how the formless, unmanifest supreme Principle, known as Shiva, manifests as the universe. The authoritative scripture of Shaivism is the *Shivasutras.*

Shakti: 1. *lit.* force, energy; 2. the divine cosmic energy which projects, maintains, and dissolves the universe; 3. spouse of Shiva.

Shiva: The supreme Principle of the universe, who is transcendent as well as immanent; the supreme Self.

Shivasutras: One of the main scriptures of Kashmir Shaivism, said to have been revealed by Lord Shiva to the sage Vasuguptacharya in order to perpetuate the philosophy of nondualism. The text consists of twenty-seven *sutras* (aphorisms) which were found inscribed on a rock in Kashmir.

Siddha: Perfect one; one who has attained oneness with the supreme Reality and who lives in the state of complete inner freedom.

sushumna: The central and most important of the 72,000 *nadis,* which extends from the base of the spine to the top of the head. The awakened

Kundalini rises up through the *sushumna,* piercing all the *chakras* (centres of consciousness), which are located in it.

Tantra: Scriptural text revealed by Lord Shiva in the form of a dialogue with his consort Parvati.

Upanishads (*lit.* sitting near): The teachings of the ancient seers, forming the end portion of the Vedas.

Vijnana Bhairava: A Tantra text of Kashmir Shaivism.

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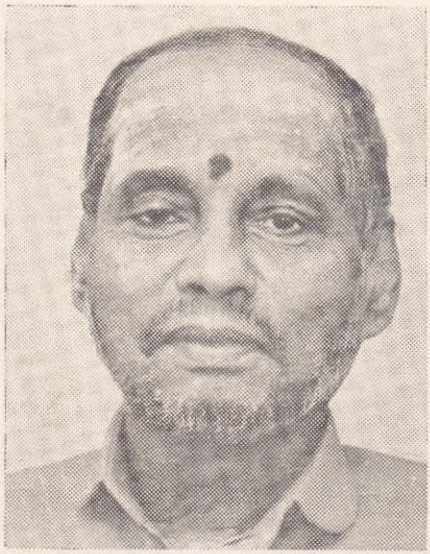

Hamsa is the natural mantra,
linked to the life-force of every living being.
It is literally the sound of our breathing.
To understand *Hamsa* is to become aware
of our unity with the cosmos.
Its secret was first revealed in the
great Kashmir Shaivism treatise, the *Vijnana Bhairava.*
Commenting on the original text,
Swami Muktananda explains the technique
and philosophy of this simple and
mysterious awareness.